

East Suffolk Shadow Authority

Agenda
Item
8

SHADOW CABINET

Monday 10 December 2018

COUNCIL TAX CARE LEAVER DISCOUNT (REP 15 (SH))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To approve a policy for awarding Council Tax discount for those under 25 years of age previously under the care of Suffolk County Council

Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open
Wards Affected:	All Wards across East Suffolk
Cabinet Member:	Councillors Stuart Lawson and Bruce Provan Cabinet Members with Responsibility for Resources Councillor Richard Kerry Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Housing
Supporting Officer:	Simon Taylor Interim Chief Finance Officer 01394 444570 simon.taylor@eastsoffolk.gov.uk Jo Andrews Strategic Revenues Manager 07984 255408 jo.andrews@angliuarevenues.gov.uk

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Billing Authorities have the power to allow a Council Tax discount under S13A of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended), for individual cases or a class of cases.
- 1.2 Billing Authorities are being encouraged to offer a reduction in Council Tax for care leavers as part of efforts to help them avoid getting into debt and give them more time to learn how to manage their finances. This follows the recommendations made in the Government's care leaver's strategy, "Keep on Caring" (July 2016). The Communities and Local Government Select Committee also recommended to Government in their report into homelessness (August 2016) that care leavers should not be required to pay Council Tax until they are 21.
- 1.3 Care leavers often have to start living independently much earlier than their peers taking on more financial responsibilities, when they might be on a low income and without the same family support network.
- 1.4 As a corporate parent, Suffolk County Council has a responsibility to support care leavers whilst they are developing the skills and confidence to live independent lives and learn vital life skills. East Suffolk Council has a duty to co-operate and a legal obligation to assist in re-housing/securing support.
- 1.5 Children and young people who are looked after are amongst the most vulnerable groups in our community. A good corporate parent should have the same aspirations for a child in care or a care leaver as a good parent would have for their own child.
- 1.6 By granting a discount on Council Tax for the first few years of independent living, the Council would potentially be providing practical help and financial assistance of great value to care leavers at a very vulnerable stage in their transition from care.

2 THE ISSUES

- 2.1 Suffolk County Council has offered to support a local discount for care leavers by contributing funding towards the cost of Council Tax discounts equal to their precept share of the Council Tax. East Suffolk would therefore bear the remaining cost of the discount (22%) if agreed.
- 2.2 A care leaver discount would be allowed only after the award of any statutory Council Tax discounts (except Council Tax Reduction) e.g. single person discount.
- 2.3 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 came into force on 1st April 2018. The Act places additional responsibilities on local authorities in relation to the welfare of children and young people including care leavers. The Act specifies that local authorities with responsibility include District Councils as well as County Councils and places a duty to support Care Leavers up to the age of 25. Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 there is a duty to improve the life chances of young people living in and leaving care, meaning that there must be a plan for these individuals so that they have the support needed to make the transition to a successful adult life.
- 2.4 A Care Leaver is defined as a person aged 25 or under, who has been looked after by a local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14; and who was looked after by the local authority at school-leaving age or after that date.
- 2.5 The other Suffolk District Councils have been approached by Suffolk County Council and are open to a proposal to implement a care leaver discount.
- 2.6 The cost of allowing a discount under S13A falls directly on the Billing Authority (East Suffolk) and therefore its Council Tax payers. However, in this case Suffolk County Council would fund a proportion of the cost based on their precept share.

- 2.7 There are currently 147 Care Leavers aged under 25 years within East Suffolk. In worst case scenario, based on an average Band B dwelling with a single person discount, the cost of awarding a Care leaver discount would be £137K per annum.
- 2.8 As Suffolk County Council have agreed to fund their share, the cost to East Suffolk Council would therefore be £30K per annum. Obviously this is an estimate based on the current years charge and current caseload and would vary from year to year.
- 2.9 In reality the cost is likely to be less as the Care Leaver may not have a Council Tax liability, for example, they may live with former foster carers or in Houses in Multiple Occupation.

3 HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO EAST SUFFOLK BUSINESS PLAN?

- 3.1 The Council Tax Care Leaver Discount policy relates to the East Suffolk Business Plan in relation to Health and Wellbeing of the individuals eligible against this policy and to ensure they get all the help they need.

4 FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The cost of discretionary discounts is usually met by the billing authority, however in this case Suffolk County Council has agreed to fund their share of the cost which will result in an estimated cost to East Suffolk of £30K per annum.

5 OTHER KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 This report has been prepared having taken into account the results of an Equality Impact Assessment, a Sustainability Impact Assessment and a Partnership Impact Assessment

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group was approached by Suffolk County Council and unanimous support was given to introduce a Suffolk wide policy.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 Not to award a discount.

8 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 Providing a discount will support East Suffolk’s duty to assist in re-housing/securing support for Care Leavers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the policy for awarding discounts set out in Appendix A is approved for implementation from 1 April 2019.

APPENDICES	
Appendix A	Care Leaver Policy

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Please note that copies of background papers have not been published on the Council's website but copies of the background papers listed below are available for public inspection free of charge by contacting the relevant Council Department.

Date	Type	Available From
19/11/18	Equality Impact Assessment	Financial Services
19/11/18	Sustainability Impact Assessment	Financial Services
19/11/18	Partnership Impact Assessment	Financial Services